DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 296 014 UD 026 032

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TITLE Nicaragua: Political-Economy as Communication and Media Influence.
PUB DATE 2 Oct 87
NOTE 47p.; Paper presented at the Society for Educators and Scholars Annual Conference (12th, Charleston, IL, October 2-3, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Activism; Censorship; Communication Research; Communism; *Developing Nations; *Economic Climate; Economics; *Freedom of Speech; Intellectual Freedom; International Relations; *Mass Media Effects; News Media; *Political Influences; Political Issues; Social Action
IDENTIFIERS *Nicaragua; Reagan Administration

ABSTRACT

The Nicaraguan people, through a successful revolution and subsequent elections, have chosen a communist government. This paper, using an historical-descriptive methodology, examines the status of Nicaragua under the current political-economy that prevails in that nation. Political-economic statements made and published in the press that support or criticize Nicaragua's administration are studied. The media's influences as advocate and adversary are discussed. It was found that the media has influence when it is permitted to speak openly and freely. The Nicaraguan government is moving towards conciliation with the Reagan Administration's demand for human rights in Nicaragua. This is demonstrated by the facts that "La Prensa" and "Radio Catolica," both of which have criticized the government, are back in operation, and that free elections are once again being discussed. A list of references is included. (BJV)

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ED296014

Nicaragua: Political-Economy as Communication and Media Influence

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Speech Communication

Eastern Illinois University

a paper presented

to the Society for Educators and Scholars

Twelfth Annual Conference

October 2-3, 1987

Charleston, Illinois

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Dedication

To Sheila Ann and Monica Lynn, my daughters, who along with myself and the American people hope and pray for peace that brings greater freedom to the people of Nicaragua and Central America.

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Abstract

The people of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Central America, and the Caribbean Basin have been engulfed in a struggle for greater autonomy and prosperity during the second half of this century. During this century, The Mexican and Cuban Revolutions have inspired the people of Nicaragua to shape their country as they see fit. Mexico opted for a democratic republic where the Partido Republicano Independiente (PRI) has dominated since the revolution; Cuba opted for communisum where the communist party there has dominated since their revolution; El Salvador's free election has resulted in that country's choice for a democratic republic; and, Nicaragua's successful revolution and subsequent elections have resulted in a choice for a communist form of government.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the status of Nicaragua under the current political-economy that prevails in that nation. Political-economic statements made and carried in the press that support or negate Nicaragua's administration are scrutinized; furthermore, the media's influence as advocate and adversary are discussed.

The paper concludes by stating that the government in Nicaragua is moving towards conciliation vis-a-vis the Reagan Administration's demands for human rights there, e. g., La Prensa and Radio Catolica are back in operation and free elections are, once again, being discussed.

Methodology

To accomplish the paper's purpose, an historical-descriptive qualitative methodology is used.

Introduction

Not since Viet Nam has there been a greater debate concerning American foreign policy, or the lack of it, as now exists vis-a-vis Nicaragua. The issue of Nicaragua, for many, appears identical to that of Viet Nam. American foreign policy of containment was shattered during the Nixon Administration and the U.S. Congress wonders whether or not this theory is applicable in this hemisphere. Due to a lack of consensus on the part of the Senate and the House of Representatives, a viable alternative to the Reagan Doctrine has not been forthcoming. For the present, the most Congress can say is "No" to the President's requests to support Contra funding: Military aid.

Ideally, what is needed is an agreement among all interested parties: Amercians, Sandinistas (FSLN), Contras, other Central Americans, peoples of the Caribbean Basin, the OAS, and the Contadora group. Lately, the most exciting proposal to come forth is that of President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica. He has said "Give the Sandinistas until November 7, 1987 before Secretary of State George Shultz asks the U.S. Congress for additional Contra aid. Let's see if they (FSLN) can reopen the press (La Prensa) and Radio Catolica" (The McLaughlin Group, September 13, 1987).

This paper examines Nicaragua primarily as a North versus South relationship; however, just as important is the East versus West relationship; therefore, this paper also

attempts to discuss, in part, the U.S.S.R.'s involvement in Central America, specifically, Nicaragua.

The mass media comes into play in Nicaragua, as in other places around the globe, insofar as it can serve the private sector, the government, or the people. When media serves the private sector it makes statements of an economic nature, when it serves the government it makes statements of a political nature, and when it serves the public it defends the public from political economic statements made by the private sector and by the government, thus: Political-econony as communication and media influence. To be sure, this condition is possible only in a society where freedom of the press is allowed. Therefore, the case of freedom of the press in Nicaragua becomes paramount in this study and is central to the entire text, either as direct or indirect correlates of the topic under discussion.

Methodology

Initially, an historical approach is used and this is necessary in order to understand U.S. involvement in Nicaragua; however, for the most part, a descriptive approach is used where a juxtaposition of views is entertained that "speak" about Nicaragua and what has transpired there. Finally, after considering what Sandinistas say about themselves and their revolution and after discussing liberal, moderate, and conservative views vis-a-vis Nicaragua, a look ahead is presented. Statements about the press appear

throughout the text.

Sandinistas Speak

A perusal of Sandinista literature is incomplete unless the Sandinista leaders, themselves, are allowed to put forth their ideas: their ideology. Tomas Borge, Carlos Fonseca, Daniel Ortega, Humerto Ortega, and Jaime Wheelock represent the past and present leadership of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). This revolutionary group takes its name from a Nicaraguan hero, General Augusto Cesar Sandino. Sandino, according to their accounts, in 1927 "organized an army of workers and peasants to drive out the U.S. Marines, who had again occupied Nicaragua in 1926" (Borge et al, 1983, p. 8). Carlos Fonseca Amador, one of the FSLN founders, was its central leader until he was murdered by the Somoza dictatorship in 1976 (p. 10). According to the United States Department of State, Tomas Borge is an avowed Marxist-Leninist and the sole surviving founder of the FSLN (Human Rights, 1986, p. 10). Thus, Tomas Borge, Daniel Ortega, Humberto Ortega, and Jaime Wheelock are all members of the FSLN's National Directorate (Borge et al, 1983, p. 10).

Fonseca and others created the FSLN in July 1961. Prior to that as a student, Fonseca had joined the pro-Moscow Nicaraguan Socialist Party, with which he later came into political conflict (Borge et al, p. 23). He ran up a series of detainments and, after escaping from a Costa Rican jail

in 1969, he went to Cuba where he published "Nicaragua: Zero Hour." In this moving account of the economic situation in Nicaragua, he states "The people of Nicaragua have been suffering under the yoke of a reactionary clique imposed by Yankee imperialism virturally since 1932, the year in which Anastasio Somoza G. was named commander-in-chief of the so-called National Guard (GN), a post that had previously been filled by Yankee officials. This clique has reduced Nicaragua to the status of a neocolony--exploited by the Yankee monopolies and the local capitalist class" (p. 23). This statement serves as a rallying point for the Sandinistas that will later lead or follow.

One such leader, Daniel Ortega, will remind the plenary session of the Sixth Summit Conference of Nonaligned Countries being held in Havana September 3-9, 1979, that in January 1928 when the Panamerican Conference was held in Havana "Not a single voice was raised at that Havana meeting" in favor of General A. C. Sandino, who wished to let the assembly gathered to know "how the people of Nicaragua, who are valiantly fighting and suffering, are determined to make any sacrifice, even including their own extermination, in order to defend their liberty," against Yankee intervention (Borge et al, p. 43). Forty-one days after achieving a successful revolution, he says, Nicaragua can now join Cuba and the other nonaligned nations of the world because they "are playing an important role and exercising a growing

influence in the international sphere, in the struggle of peoples against imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, apartheid, racism, including Zionism and every form of aggression. Because, they are for active peaceful coexistence, against the existence of military blocs and alliances, for restructuring international relations on an honorable basis, and are for the establishment of a new international economic order (p. 45).

From what has been stated above, Ortega supports the nonaligned countries. That these countries essentially espouse the communist philosophy seems clear as Jean Francois Revel states in his book How Democracies Perish (1985, p. 197).

Humberto Ortega is commander-in-chief of the Sandinista People's Army. In an interview conducted by exiled Chilean journalist Marta Harnecker, he says "the victory of the Cuban revolution caused a tremendous political upheaval. It made a big impact on our people, who witnessed a practical example of how it was possible to overthrow a tyrant (Borge et al, p. 55). In the interview, he speaks about how the Sandinistas "followed up on the legacy of the revolutionary movement Sandino started" (p. 55).

By late 1975, he says, Somoza was losing more and more political authority "we gained it, in spite of the difficult conditions facing our tenacious guerrillas in the northern mountains, where the forces of the Pablo Ubeda column were

striving to regain the initiative," the dictatorship had deprived them. Shortly afterwards and as a result of the acute economic crisis, business groups, that had adjusted their interests to the terms imposed by the dictatorship, "shifted to a position of overt opposition. A group of members of the conservative party led by the editor of La Prensa, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, joined the Democratic Union of Liberation (UDEL), an anti-Somoza opposition organization led by dissatisfied sectors of the bourgeoisie. UDEL demanded political and trade union freedoms; an end to the press censorship, the state of siege, and the repression; and called for amnesty and a general pardon for political prisoners and exiles" (Borge et al, p. 56).

By 1977 there was a great deal of political activity as a result of a foreign policy shift by the Carter Administration (Borge et al, p. 57; Muravchik, Winter 1986/87, p, 381). "Imperialism and reaction were seeking ways of making changes in the regime without touching the basic strings of power: the tremendous economic and repressive power of the National Guard. The political situation forced Somoza to try to improve his image. On September 1977 the state of siege and martial law were lifted, and the dictator convened municipal elections. Ortega continues, "Keep in mind these efforts at democratization or overhauling took place in 1977, when imperialist and reaction were convinced that they had been

able to wipe out or practically wipe out the FSLN" (Borge et al, 1983, p. 57).

From 1975 to 1977, Humberto Ortega relates, the opposition, Somoza, had tried everything "to crush us militarily. In order to do so they devastated vast portions of the countryside, repression was stepped up in the cities, and courts-martial were instituted. Nearly all our leaders, Carlos Fonseca, Eduardo Contreras, Carlos Aguero, Edgar Munguia, and Filemon Rivero, had been killed" (Borge et al, p. 57). "If we didn't take the political and military offensive, defeat was certain. That was the problem we faced" (p. 59).

Tomas Borge is Nicaragua's Minister of the Interior. The Inter-American Human Rights Commission spent a week in Nicaragua, meeting with representatives of the government, the armed forces, the judicial system, and the Catholic Church, as well as with ex-National Guard prisoners, and their families. Upon leaving, the commission announced it would recommend international humanitarian aid to Nicaragua. On October 10, 1980 Borge, speaking to the commission, says "The political thrust of this revolution and this government is unshakably and irreversibly in favor of human rights." The invitation to the commission to visit Nicaragua, he says, is one result of the historic decision to be in favor of human rights (Borge et al, p. 85).

In order to speak about human rights, he continues, you

have to speak about "all the governments Nicaragua has had. But especially about the Somoza dictatorship. Over the last half century our people have been put in fromt of the firing squad without any legal niceties being observed. They have been put into torture chambers" (Borge et al, p. 85). He charges the Somoza government with "violating all the laws, even those laws that existed in the country at the time, which are not the same as the laws that exist today (p. 86)." The implication here and the commentary that follows clearly indicates that Nicaragua will do much, much better in the area of human rights, than ever occurred under the Somoza dictatorship.

In addressing Commission President Thomas Farer, a U.S. citizen, he asks "You, Mr. President--just imagine that they murdered your wife, the way they murdered mine. Imagine if they brutally murdered your son or brother, if they had raped your wife or sister or daughter--and then you came to power. This will give you some idea of the moral stature of the leaders of this revolution, that we have not taken revenge against those who did us so much harm" (Borge et al, p. 88).

With regard to private enterprise, he says, "We want to see the development of private enterprise, private commerce, and private cultivation of the land. Furthermore, we have no interest in nationalizing the land. On the contrary, we are interested in expanding private ownership of the land"

(Borge et al, p. 96). Borge suggests they favor cooperatives, but again, "if there are also private enterprises involved in agricultural production, we want them to develop too" (p. 96).

Regarding communications he declares "It is true that certain means of communication, such as Radio Sandino, belong to the FSLN, just like Radio Corporacion belongs to the reactionaries. It is also true that other means of mass communication, such as television, are in the hands of the state. I wish you would ask the French why they control certain communications media. Television, for example, is in the hands of the state in France--and not only in France but in Spain, too, just like in Nicaragua. The reason is that the television stations belonged to Somoza, and what was Somoza's passed into the hands of the new state. If there had been a television channel in private hands, it would still be in private hands" (Borge et al, p. 98).

He concludes his discussion on television noting they are not in favor of licensing a new commercial television station, because "we are trying to transform Nicaraguan television. Traditionally, television has been very alienating. Alienating because it encourages pornography, because it glorifies crime and violence. We are making a big effort to transform television into something educational, because television is a very effective medium of communication"; moreover, he asserts, they have nothing

against the idea of opening up television to other political forces such as the Church (Borge et al, p. 98).

The last FSLN leader to speak here is Jaime Wheelock. He is Nicaragua's minister of agricultural development. Speaking to the First International Conference in Solidarity with Nicaragua, held in Managua January 26-31, 1981 he greets the gathering saying "Brothers and sisters from all those countries and peoples that for a long time have been supporting the formidable efforts of the Nicaraguan people to conquer their freedom, national independence, and social progress: Today we would like to give you some general information on the achievements and the prospects of the Sandinistas economy" (Borge et al, p. 113).

To begin, he says, Nicaragua is a sparsely populated country with little more than two million inhabitants concentrated primarily along the Pacific coast. With the exception of Managua and five or six cities with 30,000 or 40,000 inhabitants, the rest are practically all small peasant villages. "So much of the 50 percent of the population called urban is actually a rural population as well" (Borge et al, p. 114).

"There are some 800,000 workers incorporated into the economic activity of the country, of these, more than 60 percent were illiterate. So the labor force was a poorly skilled one, mainly engaged in handicrafts and peddling in the towns. In the countryside, tenant farmers cultivate

basic grains on tiny plots, while the bulk of the agricultural labor force works picking cotton and coffee and cutting sugarcane" (Borge et al, p. 114).

Later, he says, "the main features of the Nicaraguan economy are economic backwardness, dependence on imperialism, and a predominantly capitalist socioeconomic structure, in which we nonetheless find many who subsist on precapitalist forms of production, both in the urban handicrafts and peasant sectors.

"We have a highly developed infrastructure in the Pacific zone, while in the central and Atlantic zones the conditions for production, transportation, and communications are almost totally lacking." The Atlantic coast, he describes further, is "an area three times as large as El Salvador but with a population thirty times smaller" (Borge et al, p. 114).

"So the objective economic conditions the Nicaraguan revolution was faced with were a backward structure, cultural oppression of the workers (the majority of the population), underdevelopment, and economic dependence"; nevertheless, he maintains, "Nicaragua is a country that produces enough food for its own people and has a quite efficient peasant economy" (Borge et al, p. 114).

According to Wheelock, apparently a U.S. State Department official said that the pillars of "traditional regimes" were being torn down in Central America. These

pillars, the official said, were in crisis due to "the reactionary Church hierarchy, the oligarchy, and the fascist army. Those were the three pillars on which the so-called traditional domination rested" (Borge et al, p. 118).

In concluding his address, Wheelock states that "we recorded the most important and biggest grain harvest in our country's history. We had rain, transportation and communications problems that considerably reduced the harvest, and storage problems that considerably cut production." Nevertheless, "The agricultural workers, the students who harvested cotton and coffee, the whole people, all the sectors of our people in a joint effort were able to achieve the goals set for national reconstruction in order to give Nicaragua and the Nicaraguan revolution our first major economic success" (Borge et al, p. 121).

Liberals Speak

One of the most powerful statements made on behalf of the government and the peoples of Nicaragua appeared as a New York Times advertisement April 17, 1983. "To the People of the United States" by Gabriel Garcia Marquez[1] et al begins: "The present United States administration has gone to war against the people and government of Nicaragua. It is an undeclared war, unauthorized by Congress and, therefore, unconstitutional. It is a covert war. The American people have not authorized the use of public funds for a war waged in the name of supposed intelligence operations. It is an

irrational war. It renounces diplomatic negotiations without giving them a serious try" (Rosset & Vandermeer, 1983, p. 241).

The document declares that "it is a reactionary war. The United States created and then supported the corrupt Somoza dictatorship during more than 40 years. Now it cannot tolerate an independent government in Nicaragua. It has armed the former guardsmen of the Somoza regime against the people of Nicaragua. It is an inhuman war. It is destroying the modest but profound achievements of the Nicaraguan revolution. It is destroying the crops and schools of Nicaragua. It is killing the children and the peasants of Nicaragua "(Rosset & Vandermeer, pp. 241-42).

The document further declares "it is a dangerous war. It wrenches the problems of Nicaragua and Central America out of their peculiar cultural and historical contexts and thrusts them on to the stage of east-west conflict. This distortion can internationalize the war and destroy opportunities for diplomacy, democracy and social advancements in the region" (Rosset & Vandermeer, p. 242).

Marquez et al call the war treacherous. They remind Americans that it is the fourth time in this century that "the United States has invented pretexts to invade Nicaragua. This time, it is doing so by mercenary means, pitting brothers against brothers and countries against countries in the region. It is an immoral war. Once again,

a superpower declares itself menaced by the independence of a small nation and attempts its submission by intimidation or its destruction by force (Rosset & Vandermeer, p. 242).

The document concludes dramatically saying: "We fear that the United States government is attempting to implement policy by "accomplished fact"--in Nicaragua, leaving no room for debate or opposition." A challenge is issued: "we are also confident that the people of the United States, their public opinion and their democratic institutions will speak out against this undeclared, covert, irrational, inhuman, dangerous and immoral adventure undertaken by the government of Ronald Reagan" (Rosset & Vandermeer, p. 242).

The document is sponsored by: Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Carlos Fuentes, Gunter Grass, Graham Greene, Julio Cortazar, William Styron, Heinrich Boll.[2]

Moderates Speak

In an article entitled "Peace Efforts in Central America and the US Response" by Peter Crabtree, he says "Central America has developed an increasingly explosive potential." He cites the 1983 or current worldwide recession as partly responsible for shaking the region's agro-export economic base, and that, he maintains, further exacerbates social tension there. "Popular struggles in El Salvador and Guatemala are visible evidence of social crises originating in decades of harsh military rule imposed by U.S. foreign policy imperatives" (Rosset & Vandermeer, 1983, pp. 57- 58).

Crabtree relates that it will require $20 billion in international transfer payments over the course of the present decade in order to achieve economic stability. He asks that we examine the record of the past two years in order to identify openings and blocks vis-a-vis "the peaceful resolution of regional conflict" (p. 58):

Chronology of Key Events, 1981-1982 (abbreviated)

February 1981

U.S. State Department releases a "white paper" depicting Nicaragua as the epicenter for arms traffic to Salvadoran insurgents.

The U.S. government begins a process of cutting off all economic loans and credits to Nicaragua.

Nicaragua calls for joint Honduran-Nicaraguan border patrols to curb any arms flow or suspected arms flow.

March 1981

Parade magazine discloses that ex-Somoza guardsmen are being trained in the U.S. for paramilitary attacks on Nicaragua.

April 1981

Nicaragua protests U.S. cuts and paramilitary threats of aggression being trained in the U.S....We reaffirm our wish that the Central American area become a zone of peace and security.

Nicaragua urges Honduras to halt paramilitary attacks on Nicaragua. Honduran President Policarpo Paz agrees to meet

with Nicaraguan government coordinator Daniel Ortega.

May 1981

Nicaragua's Sergio Ramirez meets with Costa Rican President Carazo Odio in San Jose. The two agree to strengthen peaceful relations between the two countries.

June 1981

Widespread rejection of U.S. charges against Nicaragua contained in the February "white paper" causes Secretary of State Haig to raise new charges that Nicaragua has received Soviet tanks.

August 1981

President Reagan sends Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America Thomas Enders for discussion in Managua. After talks, Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Miguel D'Escoto tells reporters Nicaragua is committed to bettering the increasingly deteriorating relationship with the United States.

Honduras grants permission to the U.S. to build a military base in the Gulf of Fonseca, a body of water shared by Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador.

September 1981

France and Mexico issue a joint declaration recognizing the FDR/FMLN as a "representative political force" fin El Salvador.

Joint U.S.-Honduran military maneuvers are held.

October 1981

Nicaraguan government coordinator Daniel Ortega addresses the United Nations General Assembly in support of a peace plan for El Salvador through negotiations without preconditions.

Nicaragua fully endorses the joint French-Mexican proposal for a peaceful and negotiated solution in El Salvador.

November 1981

Reagan administration intensifies charges and threats against Nicaragua. Haig tells Congress that Nicaragua is becoming a powerful totalitarian state that threatens U.S. interests and refuses to rule out military action against Nicaragua.

Regular Honduran troops attack the Nicaragua border post at Guasaule on two separate occasions using machine guns and mortars.

December 1981

President Reagan authorizes a $19 million CIA-directed plan for paramilitary and terrorist operations against Nicaragua.

January 1982

After meetings with U.S. Under-Secretary of State James Buckley in San Jose, Costa Rica, the foreign ministers of Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Honduras announce the "surprise" formation of the Central American Democratic Community:

Nicaragua, Panama, and other Central American governments are excluded.

February 1982

In Managua, Mexican President Lopez Portillo proposes a regional peace plan with three main points: the United States should cease its threats and military actions against Nicaragua; Nicaragua should reduce the size of its armed forces; the two countries should enter into mutual non-aggression pacts.

The Nicaraguan government welcomes Lopez Portillo's proposals; the U.S. response is uncertain.

March 1982

The Mexican government announces that U.S.-Nicaragua negotiations will begin in April in Mexico City; the State Department immediately responds saying the Mexican announcement is "premature."

May 1982

Mexican officials express pessimism about the likelihood of U.S.-Nicaraguan talks.

July 1982

Paramilitary attacks on Nicaragua increase dramatically.

August 1982

Nicaragua reiterates its desire for talks with the U.S.

September 1982

The Presidents of Mexico and Venezuela send an appeal to the heads of state of Honduras, Nicaragua, and the United

States that calls for an "exploration of ways that remain open to halt the worrying escalation" of the crisis. 106 members of Congress endorse the proposal.

Lt. Col. John Buchanan, U.S.M.C. (Ret.), briefs a House subcommittee on border tension between Honduras and Nicaragua. He describes Nicaragua's "military buildup" as defensive in nature. He warns of a possible Honduran invasion of Nicaragua in December.

Buchanan concludes that the capabilities of the Sandinistas have been deliberately exaggerated by the Reagan administration. He says "the Reagan administration is distorting the facts in order to justify covert operations aimed at overthrowing the Sandinistas and an unprecedented military buildup in Honduras."

In an apparent attempt to blunt the Mexican-Venezuelan peace initiative, the Reagan administration backs a "forum for peace and democracy" in San Jose, Costa Rica. Nicaragua is excluded from the forum, and Mexico and Venezuela decline to attend.

November 1982

Newsweek reveals extensive details of the U.S. paramilitary war on Nicaragua. U.S. officials confirm that the operation is intended to "keep Managua off balance and apply pressure."

Costa Rican President Monge warns President Reagan of the dangers of current U.S. policies in the region. Reagan

responds with a polite silence.

December 1982

U.S. President Reagan designs his Latin American trip to visit the leaders of all three countries neighboring Nicaragua. Nicaraguan leader Sergio Ramirez points out that U.S. diplomats continue to refuse to see high-level Sandinistas officials.

Crabtree in summarizing the above chronology refers to Wayne S. Smith, former chief of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, who says "the (U.S.) administration has denigrated negotiations and grossly misanalyzed the situation in Central America. Initially, it insisted that conflicts there were not internal...incredibly, at one point the administration even suggested that there was `no native insurgency in' El Salvador." Such thinking has led the U.S. administration to block negotiations and pursue "total military victory." (Rosset & Vandermeer, 1983, pp. 58-63).

January 1983 through August 1987

The mass media across the world reports on President Ronald Reagan's not-so-covert paramilitary war in Central America, i. e., El Salvador and Nicaragua. Free and open elections are conducted in El Salvador that result in Jose Napoleon Duarte becoming that nation's new President. El Salvador, in turn, becomes Reagan's major foreign policy victory in that region. The situation and conditions that pit the U.S. and Nicaragua ,however, remain essentially the

same: each side seems prepared for the worst: The U.S. supporting the Contras with the aid of American bases in Honduras; Nicaragua defending its borders with the aid of Soviet and East Block military hardware (mostly defensive) and the presence of Cuban and other communist advisors (Chardy, p. 1-A).

On August 24, 1987, for instance, "Ronald Reagan told Nicaraguans in a broadcast on a clandestine radio station Monday night that the United States would continue to support the Contras `until the people of Nicaragua are guaranteed basic liberties'" "(Reagan Addresses Nicaragua," p. 7-A).

"The journey's end is `Nicaragua Libre' (Free Nicaragua)," President Reagan said over the Contras' "Radio Liberacion." His three-minute taped speech in English was followed by a Spanish translation, according to the St. Louis Post Dispatch. "The speech began about 6:30 p.m. It was jammed by the government in Nicaragua but heard faintly in neighboring Costa Rica." Residents in Managua said they could hear a few of the Spanish words, but could not understand them ("Reagan Addresses Nicaragua," p. 7-A).

Reagan noted that in signing the Guatemalan peace plan President Daniel Ortega had promised to respect human rights and political and religious freedom in his nation. "The Sandinistas promised you democracy but failed to meet that commitment" he said. Reagan did not reject the Central American peace plan adopted by the five region's presidents

("Reagan Addresses Nicaragua," p. 7-A).

La Prensa has been the subject of much discussion and debate. In his article "The Nicaraguan Media: Revolution and Beyond," John Spicer Nichols writes that "for more than 40 years, the Somoza family ruled Nicaragua as its private plantation by maintaining a stranglehold on virtually every facet of national life." He cites the inability to effectively suppress La Prensa, the opposition newspaper, as an essential ingredient in the collapse of the family dynasty. "By July 1979, as the Somoza government fell to the Sandinista guerrillas, La Prensa had earned a national and international reputation for its resistance to the dictatorship" (p. 72).

Nichols relates that Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal "became editor and publisher of La Prensa in 1952 following the death of his father, who founded the newspaper in 1930 as a voice of the Conservative platform and opposition to the Somoza-controlled Liberal Party." During the 1940s, when he was a university student, until the mid-1960s his political opposition was very overt: This revolutionary activity resulted in his arrest on more than one occasion. After the mid-1960s until his assassination in 1978, his opposition became less overt and was channeled through La Prensa and Union Democratica de Liberacion, a coalition of opposition parties and groups he formed. "The Somoza family responded to the new form of opposition with long stretches

of rigid censorship and a variety of other forms of harrassment (Nichols, 1983, p. 73).

Nichols explains that during the post-war media period "missing its patriarch, the family became deeply divided about the editorial policy of La Prensa, which resumed publication shortly after the Sandinista victory in July 1979." He gives an account of what happened to the members of the Chamorro family: "Carlos Fernando left the family enterprise and became Deputy Minister of Culture and eventually editor of Barricada, the official voice of the Sandinistas. Xavier, upset by the family's conservative resistance to the new government policies, led a walkout of most of the top editors and reporters of La Prensa and formed Nuevo Diario, a cooperative owned and operated newspaper that editorially supports the government. The martyred editor's widow, Violeta, who briefly served as a member of the revolutionary junta, became chair of the board of directors of La Prensa. Her oldest son, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Barrios, became co-editor of the paper (Nichols, pp. 74-75).

Today's La Prensa is still owned by members of the Chamorro family. La Prensa, he continues, has made some substantive changes; nevertheless, it maintains a special domestic and international status. Because of the new governmental philosophy and because of a shift in editorial philosophy, the two are "again at loggerheads." In sum, La

Prensa strongly advocates the position of the business and political opposition groups and stridently opposes Marxist-Leninism in the government" (Nichols, p. 75).

Towards the end of his article, Nichols elucidates saying "all countries tend to limit the amount of criticism of the established order and to limit the range of new information and ideas during times of national crisis." Furthermore, "only after the difficult and volatile process of modernization and national development and only during times of tranquility can a country tolerate a wide range of news and opinion" (Nichols, p. 77).

Conservatives Speak

For this writer, there exist at least two views of conservatism: the most obvious being conservatists who support a conservative administration and the least obvious being those who favor isolationism. Unfortunately, most writers in the area of politics and economics and, to a lesser extent, communications do not fit neatly into any specific camp. What one analyst considers conservative might be considered moderate by another. Keeping this idea in mind, what follows reflects this writer's view of conservatism. First under discussion is an article by Lars Shoultz entitled "Nicaragua: The United States Confronts a Revolution": (An isolationist point of view); secondly, literature that supports President Ronald Reagan's "Freedom Fighters" (the current administration's point of view).

Lars Schoultz begins his article in much the same way that the bulk of Nicaraguan literature begins. He tells about a half-century of corrupt government under General Anastasio Somoza Garcia. Over the decades, stability in Nicaragua grew out of the barrel of a gun, with the majority of Nicaraguans living in conditions of extreme deprivation, and the Samoza family amassing one of the hemisphere's largest fortunes. "The quintessential banana republic, Nicaragua sat quietly in the backwater of the twentieth century" (Schoultz, 1984, p. 116).

Schoultz says "when the Samoza dynasty collapsed in 1979, so did the power of the United States in Nicaragua." The problem, however, is that the United States "bet very heavily on the losing side of a major social revolution." President Carter, according to Shoultz, "attempted to build a new more mature relationship with the leaders of revolutionary Nicaragua. Given the difficulty of this task, the Carter administration was remarkably successful in the brief time allotted by the electorate. In stark contrast, during the Reagan administration relations with Nicaragua have deteriorated to the point of open hostility with the United States conducting a much publicized `secret war' that threatens to inflame the entire region" (Schoultz, p. 116).

In the succeeding pages Shoultz presents the reader with yet another overview of what has transpired in Nicaragua. He goes further in his pointed remarks than others when he says

"with the possible exception of Cuba, Nicaragua has received more attention from the United States than any other Latin American country." For instance, interest in Nicaragua developed "after the discovery of gold in California when Commodore Vanderbilt established the Accessory Transit Company to transport gold seekers across Central America." He also gives an excellent account of U.S.-Nicaraguan relations from the above period through the rest of the nineteenth century. He talks about Walker's arrival in Central America as coinciding with the awakening of significant U.S. government interests in Nicaragua, "particularly among southerners who were seeking to add slave states to the union. Prior to the U.S. Civil War, U.S. armed forces invaded Nicaragua four times (in 1853, 1854 and twice in 1857); each occupation was brief, but each probably influenced Nicaraguans' attitudes toward this country." Schoultz asks that we imagine the feelings of San Juan del Norte, for example, "when in 1854 their city was destroyed by the U.S. Navy to avenge an insult to the American minister there." Schoultz states that "as a vassal state, Nicaragua was unable to develop any type of independent political leadership or stable political institutions." From 1933 only the national guard remained. "Its power rested on coercion rather than consent" (pp. 117-118).

An account has been given earlier concerning the period from 1933 to the present. Like others, Schoultz agrees that

"there is little or no evidence to support the allegations of significant Nicaraguan intervention in El Salvador." Moveover, "while no data contradict the fact that Nicaragua's military strength now exceeds its might during the Somoza era, neither do the data confirm the Reagan administration's fears of the militarization of Nicaragua" (p. 120).

Schoultz is of the opinion that Nicaragua's military build-up is justified, because "there are the military-dominated governments of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, all of which have expressed profound hostility toward the Nicaraguan government" (p. 122).

Schoultz acknowledges that the government-declared state of emergency on 15 March 1982 resulted in the temporary suspension of constitutional guarantees and provided for prior press censorship. Those media affected most since 1980 are La Prensa, the Trotskyite newspaper El Pueblo (closed permanently), the pro-government newspaper El Nuevo Diario, the government's own Voz de Nicaragua, an opposition party's Radio Corporacion, and the news program Radio Catolica (p. 123). "Judged by the best standards of North Atlantic constitutional systems, there is repression of the right to free expression in Nicaragua, judged by the standards of a political culture in which respect for free expression has never existed, the current government is probably the least repressive in Nicaraguan history" (p. 124).

Schoultz is convinced that the Nicaraguans "who risked

their lives in an armed confrontation with the Somoza regime are not going to capitulate to U.S. pressures. Cut their aid and they will find aid elsewhere or do without; arm and encourage their Somocista rivals and then refuse to sell them arms and they will find arms elsewhere; destabilize their economy and they will reorient it to minimize destabilization, invade their territory and they will fight tooth and nail, in the process accepting as an ally any country that will help defend the Nicaraguan revolution. We have been down this road before, and we know it leads to a foreign disaster" (pp. 132-133).

Schoultz concludes saying the United States ought to convince the Nicaraguans that it is willing to try a "nonconfrontational approach to conflict resolution." Finally, barring threats to U.S. security or gross violations of human rights, this country should remember that the U.S. goal is to protect U.S. national interests through negotiation, not to dictate the nature of Nicaraguan public policy (p. 134).

How Democracies Perish by Jean-Francois Revel, a bestseller, continues to be read by students and academicians interested in political-economy and communications as it pertains to East versus West relationships.

In referring to what he calls "the double standard" Revel states "the Soviet Union, then enjoys the privilege of being entitled not only to defend its empire, but to enlarge

it without being judged on the basis of its subject states' standards of living, social justice, political freedoms or respect for human rights. When subjugated peoples rise against communism, the West usually refrains from helping them, thus recognizing the legitimacy of Communist domination in all circumstances. The Communists, on the other hand, recognize the legitimacy of no government outside their empire, least of all in the democratic countries" (Revel, 1985, p. 298).

Revel continues, "since World War II the West has not fought or, at any rate, has not taken the offensive. It has defended itself and, on the whole, has retreated. The handful of democracies that make up the `free world' have merely tried to survive in the competition with communism." According to Revel, President Carter's human-rights policy, that caused him to suspend American aid to the dictatorship in Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia, produced no political improvement in those countries; instead, the Soviet Union won the day by increasing trade with them. Iran, he contends, was another fiasco (p. 299).

Revel in discussing Latin American governments makes a startling statement when he says "it takes a profound ignorance of history to blame American imperialism alone for the long Latin American tradition of coups d'etat, military dictatorship, civil wars, corruption, revolution, bloody terror, and repression; this goes back to the very founding

of independent states there nearly two centuries ago" (pp. 299-300). Nevertheless, he admits, just like France who supported "the political longevity of another bloodthirsty lunatic, the Central African Republic's Jean-Bedel Bokassa," so too was the United States guilty "of the same moral fault in supporting Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle, who ruled too long by terror supported from abroad" (p. 300).

The point is, he proclaims, "the free world's moral turpitude and political inconsistency are recognized, proclaimed and condemned whenever it collaborates with largely or wholly undemocratic governments that violate human rights, whether it merely accepts them passively or assists them actively (Revel, p. 300).

As the title of his book suggests, How Democracies Perish, Revel is not very optomistic about democracy's ability to survive when the rules of the game allow the Soviets to win while, at best, the Americans can only tie!

Americans Speak

White House Chief of Staff Howard Baker appearing on Face the Nation with host, Bill Plant, in August is saying that "since the Democratic Speaker of the House presented the President with a peace plan for Central America, there has been tremendous movement forward in the peace initiative in that region." U.S. Representative Theresa Schroder, also appearing on the program, says "We need to support the Central American Presidents who are working for peace in the

region....I have trouble with the term `freedom fighters.'"

Later, in response to an indirect comment made by Baker that questions the Democratic Party's commitment against communism in this hemisphere, she replies, "the right wing side of the Republican Party always asks the same question! `Do we (Democrats) support having a communist country in Central America with Cuban and Russian advisors and soldiers?' This question is ridiculous! Of course not!" We demand that Nicaragua support peace in that region and that means sending Cuban and Russian advisors and soldiers out of Nicaragua, she says. If they don't leave, then "we will act" accordingly and as necessary (CBS, August 16, 1987).

Are the communists in Central America a threat? More specifically, is the communist government in Nicaragua improving the living conditions for its people, or is it abusing human rights? In the previous sections, a case has been made for the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. What follows is a United States Department of State publication that discusses human rights in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas. As suggested in the preceding paragraph, the two major political parties in the United States are not in complete agreement as to the nature and reality of Nicaragua's revolutionary government. Meanwhile, with a Republican Administration in charge of foreign affairs, the U.S. Department of State is in a position to advance the philosophy and wishes of the present administration.

According to the U.S. Department of State's text, Human Rights in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas, the human rights commissions, whether independent, official, or the Church's Commission, were repressed in one fashion or another. For example, the Permanent Commission on Human Rights (CPDH) has survived primarily because of "strong international pressure on the Sandinistas by international human rights organizations and democratic governments" (1986, December, p. 5).

Nevertheless, in 1980 "the governing junta decreed the formation of the National Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (CNPPDH)." It is "the only body officially recognized by the Sandinista government as competent to submit requests for pardons or other forms of review of cases in which human rights violations were alleged." The reason for their own commission is obvious: "to minimize the damage being done to their international reputation by the revelations of the CPDH" (U.S. Department of State, 1986, December, p. 6).

Lastly, the Catholic Church's Commission for Justice and Peace dedicated to the promotion of human rights (COPROSA) was occupied on October 15 by agents of the Sandinistas secret police. They expelled the staff and confiscated all materials and files, including the new Commission's project plans and preliminary records. The Commission relocated to the Curia and became defunct (U.S. Dept. of State, pp. 3-7).

Throughout the text many, many instances of human rights violations are presented: The legal system: state of emergency, the various ministries, the people's anti-Somocista tribunals, and Sandinista police courts; Sandinista "mass organizations": Sandinista defense committees and Turbas Divinas (Divine Mobs); and, the Sandinista Armed Forces are all held accountable.

Turning to basic civil rights, i.e., freedom of information and freedom of the press, the U.S. Department of State of the former says "this right has been among those most consistently violated by the FSLN. From July 1979, the Sandinistas have taken steps to ensure that the Nicaraguan people can receive only the information the Sandinistas themselves provide." Of the latter the State Department says "Since March 1982, freedom of the press has not existed even in theory" (U.S. Department of State, p. 29).

The Sandinistas acquired control of much of the electronic and print media after the revolution, the State Department maintains. The Sandinistas, for instance, took over two television stations and incorporated them into the Sandinistas Television System. In addition, since coming to power, they either shut down or gained control of most of the nation's independent radio stations (U.S. Department of State, 29).

The Catholic Church's Radio Catolica was order closed on January 1, 1986, after continued harassment. Currently, the

FSLN's Radio Sandino and the government's La Voz de Nicaragua and their nationwide network of affiliates control some 20 of the approximately 41 stations in Nicaragua. "Nearly all the remaining independent stations have been intimidated into either following the Sandinista party line or dropping information programs and limiting their broadcasts to music." The surviving independent radio stations must accept prior restraint (censorship) and air Sandinista propaganda as "public service" (U.S. Department of State, p. 29).

As with numerous other sources, the State Department, too, lauds the accomplishments of La Prensa. The newspaper is praised for those decades when it was "a relentless critic" of the Somoza regime. The assassination of its editor, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal in January of 1978 "sparked the revolution that ultimately put the Saninistas in power." However, "La Prensa's continuing endorsement of democratic values soon led to open confrontation with the Sandinistas." Shortly thereafter, La Prensa was "muzzled" through heavy censorship (U.S. Department of State, p. 29).

Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, widow of the late editor, writes: "On June 26, 1986, in a note just two lines long, the Sandinista government of Nicaragua notified me that our newspaper, El Diario La Prensa, was closed down indefinitely. With this action, Nicaraguan authorities institutionalized the state's contempt for freedom of thought, speech, private property, religion and all norms of democratic government.

La Prensa had already experienced four consecutive years of brutal censorship, in which 80 percent of the material submitted for publication was suppressed every day by order of the Sandinista military censors" (Chamorro, 1986/87, Winter, p. 383).

"I tell of this, not as a long complaint of melancholy, but rather as testimony for all democracies to take notice" (Chamorro, p. 383).

If Violeta Barrios de Chamorro seems frustrated with the Sandinistas, President Ronald Reagan is even more so. Joshua Muravchik continues the Nicaragua debate by stating that President Reagan in 1986, after five grueling debates, was successful in obtaining military aid from the U.S. Congress for the rebels fighting Nicaragua's Sandinista government. "And by sanctioning, at least for the moment, the `Reagan Doctrine,' it constitutes a step, albeit a small and reversible one, in America's continuing search for a global strategy to replace the one--containment--that was shattered in Vietnam" (p. 366).

Clifford Krauss appears to support Muravchik's contention that Reagan was performing much better in 1986 in his Central American policy than the past administration did in its southeast Asian policy in 1980. "Revolution has not spread, and the leftist guerrillas of Central America are not faring well, without the deployment of U.S. troops" (1986, p. 564).

Krauss seems to have put his finger on the present situation, almost two years later, "A U.S. invasion seems almost as improbable as a contra victory, and just as problematic. As contra leaders concede, their government would face a Sandinista guerrilla resistance--caches of weapons have already been stockpiled and concealed in the mountains in case of an invasion. Judging by the current disunity in the contra leadership, there would probably be a free-for-all for power. The United States, assuming that it would not leave the contras to their own devices, would find itself in the unenviable position of trying to hunt down guerrillas while putting together and propping up civilian authorities at the national and local levels" (Krauss, p. 368).

This writer regrets being unable to include all portions of the vast debate that is currently found in the literature that abounds in the American press, especially that of a political, economic, and mass communication nature.

Summary

This paper has attempted to provide the reader with a glimpse of Nicaragua by examining political and economic statements that appear here as communiation encounters between the governments of Nicaragua and the United States. The mass media in this paper concerned itself with "freedom of the press" and all that that implies. The media has influence when it is permitted to speak openly and freely.

A Look Ahead

Today, October 1, 1987, the major American television networks carry the story that the first issue of La Prensa rolls off the presses. Radio Catolica has also been given permission to begin broadcasting. Equally dramatic are the recent reunions made possible by the joint effort of the Nicaraguan and Honduran governments ("Nicaragua Oversees Reunions," September 28, 1987, p. 1A). All of the foregoing is an attempt by Nicaragua's Sandinista government to keep faith with the Reagan Administration's demands for improvements in human rights.

Today has become yesterday. We still await peace.

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Footnotes

[1] Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a Colombian writer, received the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature.

[2] Carlos Fuentes, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at the University of Missouri--Columbia, is one of Mexico's leading writers. Gunter Grass (Germany), Graham Greene (England), Julio Cortazar (Argentina), William Styron (United States), and Heinrich Boll (Germany) are all well known writers.

Acknowledgement

Thanks Maggie, once again, for your assistance as proof reader.